

# NACA NEWS

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# Embracing Innovation in Animal Control

By Lisa Norwood, NACA Member

In most communities, animal control is performed as it has been for decades. Equipment may be updated on occasion and staff levels are sometimes augmented, but methodologies remain the same. It's a mistake that modern animal care professionals can't afford to make. It's a mistake the City of San Antonio Animal Care Services (ACS) Department made for close to 60 years before embracing innovation to bring new solutions to old problems. Just five years ago, ACS was

viewed as an archaic animal control agency with the highest per capita pet euthanasia rate in the United States. Today, ACS has used innovation and strategic thinking to emerge as an industry leader with an emphasis on balance between animal control and animal sheltering.

The City of San Antonio has used non-traditional approaches to dramatically increase success in both the shelter and field. A perfect blending of these accomplishments can

be found in the department's Comprehensive Neighborhood Sweeps Initiative or CNSI. The CNSI program uses a data-driven process to deploy sweeps teams and block walkers to identify areas of high concentration of stray animals and bite cases. This system allows the department to focus resources in areas of greatest need.

Working with Geographic Information System (GIS) specialists within the city structure, Animal Care Services generated maps based on year-to-date calls for ser-



*Above and right: The CNSI program identifies areas where strays are most concentrated.*



*Above: Officer Fidencia Quintanilla surveys the area.*



*CNSI vaccination clinics help bring the community together.*

vice. Once those calls were organized by the most recent census tract boundaries, they were plotted onto maps, and neighborhoods with high call volumes were grouped together into areas that defined the department's deployment strategy. These tracts were often bordered by features such as highways, railroads, and military bases, which help contain the movement of animals back into the targeted zone following the completion of the sweep process. Additionally, many of the target communities crossed local political boundaries which allowed for identifiable sectors that could be analyzed for measurable impact.

The maps are used to coordinate comprehensive monthly sweeps through problem areas, and the department's targeted approach does more than maximize animal control efforts. "We're seeing decreased numbers of strays in problem areas, fewer dead animals on the roadways and we're seeing higher spay/neuter interest in our target neighborhoods," says Officer Jeanne Martinez who leads ACS Field Operations. "We're increasing our city's overall public health and safety because CNSI is making a difference in communities with known enforcement related problems."

ACS coordinates volunteer resources with the deployment of animal care officers



(ACOs) to engage targeted communities door-to-door with information aimed at increasing responsible pet ownership. Students with the University of Texas at San Antonio's School of Public Policy manage the non-enforcement end of the program including volunteer recruitment and block walk coordination. This includes communication with City Council members, neighborhood associations, and other advocacy groups invested in the target area. Flyers include information on complimentary or low-cost licensing, vaccination, and pet sterilization opportunities. ACS coordinates local spay/neuter surgery partners to ramp up available surgery slots during the sweep period and low-cost shot clinics are held in high traffic areas in the neighborhood. Once these efforts are completed in the target areas, ACOs begin picking up stray animals and issuing citations during neighborhood enforcement sweeps.



CNSI volunteers work to engage targeted communities.

ACS conducts regular analysis to measure the initiative's impact to guide future efforts. By design, this process should not impact the ability of animal control to respond to priority calls for service because ACO teams focus their efforts in concentrated areas at specified times of the month.

Animal Care Services Assistant Director Vincent Medley says in the past the department used a system that assigned "sweep teams" across entire political boundaries. "The previous process ensured city wide coverage, but it was scattershot," said Medley. "Well known problem areas didn't get the focused attention needed to successfully solve their issues. CNSI allows us to bring higher levels of service to the areas with the greatest concentration of stray animals and bite cases." This innovative program has translated into more strays off the street, more citations for irresponsible owners as well as the provision of low cost pet related resources for residents that need these services the most—all the hall-

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The CNSI team works to educate citizens on issues like this dog chained to a porch.

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# Animal Control Officers

We walk a different path than most on this journey as an ACO  
Our hearts are as big as the ocean but only the animals will understand  
We see the tragedies others can't see, we do the things most won't do  
Sitting in court all day waiting on the case we might lose  
Hearing the angry voice of an owner as we ask them to care for their pet  
Patiently waiting in the pouring rain as confidence grows in the scared dog  
Courage through filth and despair as we're greeted by a house full of sick cats  
Watching with hidden tears at the death of an abused animal, helpless to its fate  
Working through the fury of Mother Nature, laughing at the challenge  
Listening as our job is explained by those who've never been in our boots  
We smile knowing it's what we gladly do, making a difference each day.

~ Rob Leinberger



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marks of a safer community for pets...and people.

*Lisa Norwood is the public information officer for the City of San Antonio Animal Care Services. She had that common childhood dream of becoming a veterinarian, but college and studies took her in a different direction. Still, she never lost her love for animals and often brought home strays, much to the chagrin of her loved ones. Ms. Norwood worked as a TV journalist for more than a dozen years in both Texas and Arizona where she was always on the lookout for animal friendly stories (and more strays!). Something told her to turn down yet another television job in hopes something better would come along and it did... in the form of a dream job doing public relations at the City of San Antonio's animal shelter. Using her media savvy, Lisa has helped get San Antonio's Animal Care Services featured in the Wall Street Journal, USA Today and CNN as well as in thousands of stories with local media.*

*Ms. Norwood has several companion animals including a Bassett Hound, a Chinese Crested, two Mexican Hairless dogs and four tolerant (but not amused) cats.*